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DEPARTMENT FOR AF/W (JHUNTER)

E.O. 12958

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SUBJECT: BYE-ELECTIONS IN PUJEHUN AND FREETOWN REFLECT APC STRENGTH

11. (U) Summary: Opposition Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) and the ruling All People's Congress (APC) candidates have each won a seat in the just concluded parliamentary bye-elections in Pujehun, Southern Province and Freetown, Western Area, respectively. Neither outcome came as a surprise, although the APC, even in defeat, demonstrated progress in overcoming the traditional SLPP dominance of the Pujehun District. End Summary.

12. (U) On January 10, The National Electoral Commission (NEC) successfully conducted two Parliamentary bye-elections in Pujehun District and in the capital. The seat in Pujehun District was declared vacant after the SLPP candidate filed and won a petition against the 2007 results that gave the seat to a member of the People's Movement for Democratic Change (PMDC) party. The results were overturned due to allegations of ballot box-stuffing. The Freetown seat was declared vacant following the death of Osho Williams (APC) in November, 2008.

13. (U) Bye-elections are historically quiet, but the build-up to these elections was particularly tense. Though an APC victory in Freetown was expected, the competition in Pujehun was unusually fierce. Pujehun has traditionally been the stronghold of the SLPP, with that party winning close to 100 percent of votes in any given election. However, with the advent of the PMDC, the SLPP's dominance of the Pujehun District was threatened as some of its members belonging to the Mende tribe shifted their allegiance.

14. (U) The elections in Pujehun were peaceful, and declared by observers as free and fair. However, campaigning at polling centers by PMDC leader Charles Margai and the APC candidate John Kai-Kai caused near-violent disturbances. People interpreted these movements as campaigning on Election Day, which contravenes the electoral laws of Sierra Leone. However, the situation was resolved when civil society and election observers urged the Local Unit Commander (LUC) of the Sierra Leone Police to intervene. The LUC went on-air on the community radio and asked all politicians to stop visiting polling centers.

15. (U) In Pujehun District, the SLPP had 5,031 votes, APC 2,032 votes, PMDC 1,984 votes and invalid votes 488 for the bye-election in Ward 87. This result is very encouraging for the APC who had 1,890 votes in the entire Pujehun District during the 2007 presidential elections while the SLPP had 33,114 and the PMDC had 28,625. The APC thus garnered more votes in this election than they received across five constituencies in the district in 2007. In Freetown, Western Area, the APC had 2,906 votes, NDA 34, PMDC 256 votes and SLPP 1,484 votes, and voter turnout at 15.4 percent.

16. (U) Comment: Though the result in Freetown was expected, the APC votes in Pujehun demonstrate that the party is becoming successful in gaining ground outside its traditional strongholds. Many believe that the APC would not have been successful during the 2007 presidential elections without their PMDC merger during the run-off. The increase in APC votes in Pujehun is likely a reflection of the party's increasing strength and popularity, and ability to absorb the disintegrating PMDC's members. Given that PMDC was more aligned with the SLPP prior to the 2007 elections, the defection of their constituents to the APC versus the SLPP may indicate that the 2012

elections are the APC's to lose.
FEDZER